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THE LOVING HISTORY
OF
PERIDORE & PARAVAIL

MAURICE HEWLETT

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Margery Bailey

Department of English, 1914-1956

Professor Emeritus, 1956-1963

A gift of her friends

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**THE LOVING HISTORY
OF
PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL**

THE LOVING HISTORY
OF
PERIDORE & PARAVAIL

BY
MAURICE HEWLETT

LONDON : 48 PALL MALL
W. COLLINS SONS & CO. LTD.
GLASGOW MELBOURNE AUCKLAND

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NOTE

A PROSE version of this fable was included in my *New Canterbury Tales*; but it had been projected as verse, and is now put forward as it was first intended to be. The temptation of Vigilas is borrowed from the life of Saint Guthlac of Croyland, as reported, I think, by Roger of Wendover; but the clew to the heart of the tale is a mediaeval belief that the soul enters the body in the mother's milk, which I have read somewhere or other but cannot now put my hand to. As for time and place, I am not bound to answer. It was "once upon a time"; and if England is not fairyland, it is often very much like it. That is all it seems necessary to say here.

WEST WITTERING,
April 1917.

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PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

I. THE FOUNDLING

I

BROAD under Heaven a great Plain is,
Which to the earth-bound, like the
 sea,
Shuts down the mind in silences
And blue horizons. There no tree
Dare stand alone, but seeks a lee
Against the wind in mates of his ;
So like an island in one tether
Bound, they ride out the winter
 weather.

I

B

2 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

2

There, in a desolation vast,
Transient beneath the ringing dome,
The storm-beat shepherd's lot is
cast,
With shiftless beasts inur'd to roam—
With limping hare that has no home,
With plover, plaything of the blast,
That makes no nest, but on bare
earth
Nurses her freckled eggs to birth.

3

Unwritten is that sky of brass
By kindlier bird, untenanted
That billowing vacancy of grass
By horn'd or man'd or antler'd head ;
There only, swarming to be fed,
The sheep in murmuring legions
pass,
Like a foam-patch which on the main
Accrues, disparts, and leaves no stain.

4

Only at night the secret things
 Whose doings certify the stars
 Betray themselves in pulsing wings,
 In hasty scratchings whose left scars
 The dawn reveals : or some cry mars
 The silence which like grave-clout
 clings
 About the land. Here do their rites
 Foumart and brock and fox o' nights.

5

Yet men in such gaunt emptiness
 Have made a shift in days gone by
 To live and labour, and no less
 Crave intercession from on high ;
 And here they rear'd towards the
 sky
 A giant shrine by main duress—
 A mighty cenotaph of stones
 To voice their breath and serve their
 bones,

4 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

6

Which elsewhere under mound and
barrow
Crouch, with their trusted flints beside,
With some hope of an outgate narrow
Where forethought may be justified.
Meantime, they say, let memory bide
Of love and toil, of sap and marrow ;
For though their flesh return to clay
That great Ring stands their deeds to
say.

7

Fretted by weather, cold and heat,
A shagg of ruin hoar and vain,
Aeons of time have render'd it
Most like a secular moraine.
Of that once labyrinth on the Plain
Still stand unshatter'd, undefeat,
Scarr'd reeling pylons, like a cage
Wherein some old God mew'd his
rage.

8

Ere Christ had ris'n four hundred
years

The reek of it yet savour'd blood ;
A haunted place and full of fears,
Inveterate testimony it stood
To all a pastoral neighbourhood,
Neither for outcry nor for tears,
But, since All-Good can brook All-
Evil,
Warning to 'ware both God and Devil.

9

But there, because a place of dread
Inflames an itch for dreadful doings,
The Witches us'd not fear to tread,
To mate and couple in the ruins.
There on wild nights their squalls and
mewings

Made the dark vivid—for these wed
Like leopards, and 'tis pain not ease
Which heels to love the like of these.

6 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

10

There also, seeing the place was rife
With horror, in those ancient days
A hermit liv'd his rugged life
And with their lewdness serv'd his
praise.

Over their shrieks his pray'r he'd raise,
Dare holy with unholy strife.
Vox in deserto, such he was ;
Men call'd him Blessed Vigilas.

11

Sign-post of doom, less man than shell
Was he, from whom came hollow noise,
Which like a lone wind rose and
fell,
Having no semblance of the voice
Wherewith a man may sound his joys
Or woes. It tocsin'd like a knell
Reproach of flesh, the watchman's
cry,
" The hour is late, the end is nigh."

12

A wattled hut hard by the scar
That great Ring makes upon the
level

He held, and wag'd untiring war
On all the creatures of the Devil,
That is, on all things made; for
evil,

Said he, inhabited our star
Since Adam fell, and open'd sin
To all who owed him origin.

13

The gadding witch-kind went in fear
Of Vigilas, that ghostly flail,
For on their Sabbaths he fell sheer
Like the storm-slanted arrowy hail
On tender leafage. Woe and bale,
Haro, derision, scoff and fleer,
Outcry and scorn—these hosts he
led

Against them; and they always fled,

8 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

14

Leaving their hornéd paramour
Lonely and scowling in the Ring,
Legion to all the world no more,
But — the Black Man ! a flouted
king,
A boggart in a field, a thing
Reject and null—whereat he'd score
His wrinkl'd flanks and cry an oath,
“ This man shall fall, or I, or
both.”

15

But going about incessantly
With his accustom'd wiles and snares,
He found no vantage to his gree
To take the Hermit unawares ;
For when he was not at his prayers
He plied his scourge, lest men might
see
One spot which was not raw or rent
In his old fleshly tenement.

16

At last our Enemy, with the few
 He trusted, whereof one had name
 Beelzebub, and th' other two
 Were Termagaunt, who knows no
 shame,
 And Lucifer, in whose dark fame
 The Angels vaunted as he flew
 Mocking in Heaven, and so were
 lost
 And serv'd God for a holocaust—

17

With these, I say, he schem'd a gin
 Wherein to trap the godly man,
 To net him fast in webs of sin
 Whose only outlet Hellward ran.
 So rarely fashion'd was the plan
 There was a chance two souls to win ;
 For with a soul his trap was baited
 To snare that high soul which he
 hated.

c

10 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

18

All-Hallows Eve a volleying wind
Beset the Ring. All night it fought
Like some wild agony of mind
Wherein a sinner may be caught.
As swift as fear or wicked thought
Which neither Time nor Place can
bind
Came witchwife after witch, and lit
Within the Ring, and madden'd it.

19

The wind inspires their dangerous glee ;
They leap, they ride, they skip, they
dance,
Of his mad freedom making free ;
They mew like cats, they scream and
prance ;
They mount, they rear, they fling askance,
Rank as he-goats. Then suddenly
Two fall a-fighting, while the rest
In tarring them renew their zest.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 11

20

In a wide space of cold moonlight
They roll'd and bit, the others bawling
As face or face wicked and white
Show'd in the beam from Heav'n down
 falling
A cry to arms, their caterwauling
To Vigilas ! From left to right
He sign'd his breast ; to the Ring he
 strode,
Then like a wind of wrath from God,

21

Swift, sudden, irresistible,
He drave the hags to either side,
As a bull madden'd wreaks his will
On market-lumber far and wide.
" Imps of the Fiend, avaunt ! " he cried,
" Out, maggot-brood, and swarm in
 Hell ! "
Then as he voic'd the Name of dread
And shap't the Cross, the witches fled.

12 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

22

With whoop and howl and mocking call
Down the wild wind they flung in
race ;

Far in the dark he heard them bawl
Their ribaldry ; but with stern face
Into the very heart of the place
Where late those wantons lay asprawl
He urged—and there he stood and
shook

In palsy grip—yet still must look.

23

Lo, in a moonlit pool of grass
A young child lying wrapt in fleece,
So sound asleep to see it was
To feel the very palms of Peace
Cool on the brow. Oh, what was
this ?

Was it a snare for Vigilas,
Or call to save ? His mind was dumb,
But not his heart. He bare it home.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 13

24

Back to his hermitage he bare
That child all cradled up in wool :
A girl-child, delicately fair,
Well-nourisht, shapely, beautiful
As some frail flower. Down on his
 stool
He sat, and mutter'd broken pray'r,
Poring his treasure. Thanks he render'd
To God, and then himself surrender'd

25

To save this innocent from bale,
From woe of Earth and wrath of Heaven.
" Make Thou me strong and not to
 fail,
O Lord, for this poor flesh of leaven
Whereby her sins may be forgiven
In grace—" but there his timorous wail
Was ended in aposiopésis,
Thinn'd out beneath a warmer thesis.

14 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

26

Triumphant joy, as never yet
All his long commerce with the
skies

Had put him in the way to get,
Flooded him with new sympathies ;
Melted his heart and drown'd his
eyes—

Until the child began to fret ;
And blindly nozzling in his smock,
Made his old heart his ribs to knock.

27

The creature hunger'd—yet no skill
Of his avail'd him to supply it.
He warm'd it milk, for fear of chill,
And dipt his finger in, to try it.
The sucking child took little by it,
But he, the fosterer, knew one thrill
A father may—but not that other
He has, to know his wife made
mother.

28

Yet as it fretted, pok't and pusht,
 Seeking, but finding not, the fount,
 Deeply within his sear'd flesh
 gusht
 Some sacred longing past account.
 He felt a primal passion mount
 And brim the brain. That well-spring
 flusht
 The very issues of his heart,
 And learn'd him method, if not art.

29

He snatcht the child up to his
 breast,
 Cover'd it, bore it thro' the dark ;
 League after league like one possest
 He cours'd, upheld by purport stark.
 Still was the night ; the raven's bark
 Was all the sound : he took no rest.
 Four leagues he cover'd ere the grey
 Silver'd the sleeping eyes of day.

16 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

30

In a white village where dense trees
Dream beside muffled cottage-steads
He stands at last with shaking knees,
His urgent traverse told in beads
Upon his face. He nothing heeds
Beside his errand, but he sees
The house of search snug under
thatch,
And knocks, and rattles at the latch.

31

There lies a good wife brought to bed
Of her first-born, to whom his case
He pleads, and by her boy's dark head
His girl's sun-garlanded he lays.
"Daughter, nurse you the twain," he says,
"And count on Grace where Grace is
bred."
"Sir, they shall share alike of me,"
She said, "but Christians first should
be."

32

Then Vigilas, that urgent man,
 Dropt water on the pair in
 store
 Upon her bosom, and began
 The Office found by holy lore ;
 And nam'd the man-child Peridore,
 A name which thro' his folk-line ran ;
 Then to the babe he had sav'd from
 bale
 He said, " Be thou nam'd Paravail.

33

" For *par avail* into the fold
 Thou cam'st, and *par avail* I shrive
 The soul of thee of Satan's hold,
 Bought back in this last day alive ;
 And *par avail* thou shalt contrive
 To yield me usury manifold
 Of such dear purchase. Now God
 bless
 This new graft on my godliness ! "

D

34

So said, the strenuous Anchorite
Retrudged with hope the grassy leagues,
Fierce for new battle and affright,
Ripe for new fastings and fatigues.
Yet as he eyed the serried rigs
Which sunder'd him from his delight,
His treasure left in alien keeping,
He groan'd, threw arms up, and stood
weeping.

II. THE NURSELING

I

HARD is the way of sinners, harder
The way of him who sin abjures !
Who thinks to be his own safe-
guarder
Empoisons oftener than he cures.
Of his own bowels he weaves the
lures
Which snare him to the Devil's larder :
On wings of pride he towers, to spin
Head downwards from an air too thin.

20 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

2

Woe worth old Vigilas, whose heart
After such high negation now
Stood empty ! nor could all his art
Quicken his zest for prayer and vow.
“ Alack ! ” he cried to God, “ hast Thou
No thanks for him who took Thy part
So late ? ” His words beat vain and
wild,
His thoughts ran on the witch’s child.

3

His finger tingled where those lips
Like little rosy leeches tried
With his old flesh to come to grips ;
His old eyes dimm’d, his old heart
cried :
“ I seek the light and am denied,
I crave the Sun, and lo, eclipse—
Show Thyself, Lord ! ” The Lord did
not,
And down he dropt like a bird shot.

4

He'd lost his heart, therewith his
nerve

Was gone. He stood a flaccid thing,
An ill-spied arrow which will swerve
Ere it can reach its quarry a-wing.
For why? The hand upon the string
Was faint. He heard, but could not
serve

The call to arms. His heart was toss't
'Twixt foster-dam and Holy Ghost.

5

Compunctionous visions full of scars
And weals he had ; asleep, awake,
The plain was rife with sounding wars
Wherein no part for him to take.
Cowering he lay in fever-quake
While nightly under cruel stars
The witches gibber'd on his roof,
Or scream'd when Legion with his
hoof,

22 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

6

Like a hot stallion, spurr'd the thatch
Before he fell to his old work.
Vigilas shudder'd, now no match
For devildom. By day he'd lurk
In shadow'd thickets, where the murk
Accorded with his desperate watch ;
Then, slinking homewards, lo, the
Rogue
Fast on his threshold, like a dog.

7

A thin grey dog with bitten ears
And feckless grin and long-drawn tongue
Lies there, and watches how he nears
With scare-fraught eyes white-rimm'd
and long.
He will not budge for stick nor thong,
But snaps whene'er the saint appears.
Vigilas, gall'd by rage and pride,
Kickt it. It yelpt, and writh'd, and
died.

8

Deeply he dug it underground,
 And stood free man. Again it came,
 The same grey, fever-ridden hound,
 Snapping and panting, just the same.
 He drave a sharp stake thro' its
 wame

And let it lie with its death wound,
 Jerking its life out on the brank ;
 And there it died, and dead, it
 stank.

9

Nor was this all, nor yet the worst,
 But gone his demiurgic power.
 There came a drought, the land athirst ;
 He pray'd, but might not raise a
 shower.

The cattle perisht hour by hour,
 The fields lay lifeless and accurst.
 He said, " I am by God forgot,"
 Whereas the truth was, all his thought

24 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

10

Was of the child he'd put to breast,
With craving for its eager clasp,
Withouten mind of God's behest
Or ruefulness for earth agasp,
And he no help. A sun-warm'd
asp,

His nature in him rais'd its crest
And struck him deep. Deep in his
blood

He felt the venom, and swore it good.

11

" Shall not a father love his child ?
Is that so wonderful a thing ?
Shall love be lord of all the wild
And leave me out of reckoning ?
Must I alone go famishing ?
Can I forget how once she smil'd ?
Fool ! to go speiring ghostly harms
From a child cradling in your
arms."

12

So with himself he held debate,
 And with false heat his heart did
 season,
 As all men can sophisticate
 To prove the worse the better reason.
 His work for one God now stood
 treason
 Against another, the child's fate
 Incomparable to his stress
 Of aching her to repossess.

13

For as a doubting man is proud
 Firmlier to hold his faith for doubting,
 Covers his leanness in a shroud,
 And vows it much enhanced by
 clouting—
 So Vigilas confirm'd by shouting
 His self-distrust. He cried aloud,
 " She needeth me—her need is sore ! "
 To hide how much he needed more.

R

26 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

14

A month of days he bore with pain,
Then at the end of fortitude,
Fleetly he courst the grassy plain
And show'd the goodwife all his
mood.

She rail'd, he might not be withstood—
“The child is mine, give back again
My own—” He snatcht it and was
gone,
Leaving her breastmilk for her son.

15

With prayer thro' good and ill for-
tune,
With utter love he did contrive
To rear that orphan wean'd too soon,
To nurse and keep the flame alive ;
And as it grew he saw it thrive,
By God's grace and a wooden spoon.
As for his own necessities,
He fed them on her, thro' the eyes.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 27

16

So, to draw short work out of long,
All stood to show he had succeeded
In making right what had seem'd
wrong

To her whose plea he had not heeded.
What lackt his Paravail she needed ?
Was she not supple, quick and strong ?
There was no answer possible
But, if strength's all, then all was
well.

17

Slim as a wand she grew, not tall,
A slip of grace in that gaunt plot,
As wilding rose sprung from a wall,
Or lily from a mixen hot ;
So swift, so spry, so light afoot
She raced the very hares and all
The fearful creatures, though no fear
Had they of her who was their
peer.

28 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

18

She had the unconscious lazy ease
A creature has, that knows no law
But its own leisure : what it sees
It has for stretching out a paw.
Looking, she hunger'd what she saw,
And rippling flasht the prey to
 seize ;
Or, like an idle cat in the sun,
Thrill'd to her own perfection.

19

Of body's grace and strength compact,
Of loveliness in form and feature,
Of unison in mind and act—
She had that virtue of the creature
Which serves the law of its own
 nature,
Submissive only to the fact.
There wonn'd no living thing that Plain,
Save one, which held her purpose
 vain.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 29

20

With the lithe otter she could swim,
Or with the mallard stir the reeds ;
For her Brock shunn'd not in the
dim

Twilight of morn to ply his deeds
Of delving. All the lesser breeds
Of vole and squirrel, dormouse trim,
Frolickt about her. With the sheep
She commerced, and their dogs would
leap

21

To paw upon her. She was fair,
With wide brown eyes and flush of
health ;

Colour of beechmast was her hair ;
Should a man spy on her by stealth
He'd vow his utmost hope of wealth
To round his arms and cage her there.
But no man thought to spy, for no man
Would deem her measurable woman.

30 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

22

But Vigilas so deem'd, and fear'd her
The more, the lovelier she grew ;
And ever as he shunn'd he near'd
her,
Dreading the end she led him to.
He long'd and lov'd, yet loath'd her too,
For his heart warn'd him how he'd rear'd
her
To be a breathing, soulless shell,
Pluckt from, and riper made, for Hell.

23

Bitter to think he had given his soul
For this, which had no soul to save :
Now he must pay the utmost toll
And see her sackless to the grave,
More certainly since fram'd so brave,
Whom *par avail* from Doom he
stole !
Sackless he too the Doom must win
Who had let the Demon enter in.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 31

24

No soul within that form so sleek !
No soul behind those soft brown
 eyes !
The vermeil on that lovely cheek
Old Legion's, wherewith he defies
Assault, the rebel flag he flies
Whose flaunting makes our manhood
 weak !
Alas, too fair, too dear, too bright—
To sear the mind, yet draw the sight !

25

O' nights, whenas she deeply slept,
He must keep vigil. Long and loud
He cried to God, he groan'd, he
 wept,
To the cold earth his head he bow'd.
Sometimes he lapt him in his shroud
And to his open coffin crept,
And lay, and there a stuprous sweven
Blotted out Paravail, Hell and Heaven.

32 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

26

Come the grey dawn he has her
stand
Upright between his rigid knees,
Touches her features with his hand
And tells their dangerous falsities :
“ This bosom veils a soul’s disease ;
Those two bright eyes from Light are
bann’d,
Since, being evil, they see such ;
That mouth no holy brede dare touch.”

27

Instruct by him, she gets by rote
The words accusing her sweet members,
Assures him they are black and bloat,
Of Tophet’s fire the reeking embers.
She falters, tries back, then remembers
And runs on in a voice remote ;
Then having said them all and
right,
Turning, she flashes out of sight.

28

Alone, the long day, she is flitting
 In holts and hollows of the plain,
 Now coursing like a deer, now sitting
 Intent and motionless ; again
 Nibbling at berry, nut or grain
 With eyes all ways, quick, but un-
 witting—

Those wide, unwinking, soulless eyes
 Which look all round you animal-
 wise.

29

In shape the loveliest of our kind,
 With the clear voice and wooing tone
 Which cast a noose upon the mind
 And make a man automaton ;
 Neither to good nor evil prone,
 Looking not forward, nor behind—
 Midway she wonn'd 'twixt man and
 beast,
 Most dangerous where she meant it least.

F

34 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

30

Woe to you, Vigilas, distract
 'Twixt ghostly zeal and fleshly lure !
 How now fulfil your heavenly pact,
 Make calling and election sure ?
No way but kill if thou wouldst cure.
 " What ! Slay my love and so be rackt
 With endless sorrow ? Nay, sweet
 Lord ! "
I warn'd thee : not peace, but a sword.

31

He'd watch her go, but dared not
 follow ;
 He'd pray for her, but never learn'd
 How his pray'r sped. His heart was
 hollow,
 A brazier where a dull fire burn'd.
 When from his knees she lightly turn'd
 And dipt the lintel like a swallow,
 He sat, and felt the Devil's rowels
 Drive at his reins and tear his bowels.

32

Just as he lov'd her, so he hated,
 For so man's love is double-edged,
 So sweet and bitter find them mated,
 Into one narrow entry wedged,
 Unto one dolorous issue pledged
 That what you crave must first be
 weighted
 With the abhorrence and disgust
 Which are the lees of your own
 lust.

33

So when you've won it, your old dearth,
 Old wounds and gangrene fester there,
 And make the prize of doubtful worth.
 You turn it back and front, you stare—
 "Was this the face I thought so
 rare?"
 You mock yourself with acrid mirth.
 Fool I find a better looking-glass;
 Yourself you see, and not the lass.

36 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

34

So brooded he, like a sick hen
White-eyed and ruff'd, that on one leg
Hides darkling, while beyond her ken
The world's affairs of nest and egg
Get done. Up, Vigilas, go beg
No mercy more for mortal men
Than this, to dream without awaking,
Or give the heart without heart-breaking !

III. PARAVAIL

I

Now to this pair so unaccorded
Occasion came, as come it will,
When clamant man goes unrewarded
And maid insipient thinks no ill.
Peridore's young heart was the
still
Wherein the poison Vigilas hoarded
Was brew'd—that thirty-days' breast-
mate
Of Paravail's, now ripe for fate.

38 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

2

A lithe and proper youth, free-
moving,
Was he, become like all his race
A shepherd, with his flock a-roving
From grassy place to grassy place.
That honesty glow'd in his face
Wherewith he rul'd his soul's behoving ;
Within his blood that salt-tide raced
Which, moving laughter, kept him
chaste.

3

He saw this world so fair an inn,
Himself so negligible guest,
It seem'd as reasonable to sin
As for a bird to foul her nest.
To work, to sleep, to have no guest
But whom your constancy might win,
And her to cherish, and be glad
All your life-days — so judged this
lad.

4

Straying the waste at her wild will,
 She happen'd on him where he lay,
 His flock about him, dreamy and
 still

In the mild promise of a day,
 Dark-hair'd and berry-brown—but
 fay

He thinks her, sprite of stream or hill.
 He sits at gaze, his chin to his knees,
 Not daring utter what he sees.

5

She, like a wild thing, noses him
 Upon the air, and peers about
 With large eyes wondering and dim,
 While tiptoe and with fingers out
 She hesitates, incarnate doubt
 In momentary nerve and limb,
 As if each tense expectant muscle
 Would flash response to gleam or
 rustle.

40 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

6

Drawn by some spell she cannot
guess,
Nearer she comes, is now so close
The very texture of her dress
Is plain, the nails upon her toes
Like little shells of faintest rose,
Satiny from the wave's caress ;
So near at last, her quick breath
beats
On his, and clings to what it meets.

7

Hovering she stays, then delicately
Touches his hair, his arm, his frock—
As by the fingers children see—
While he sits rigid as a rock ;
Ignoring then his heart's loud
knock,
Or bolden'd by it to make free,
She lays her cheek against his cheek,
And wooing him, begins to speak.

8

O Heaven ! O Earth ! This child of
wonder

Who speaks his tongue, or whispers it,
Puts now her hand his own hand
under,

Now turns herself about to sit
Between his knees. His mother wit
Saves him ineptitude or blunder.
He neither leads her nor reproves,
But takes for granted both their loves.

9

As in the dream-world, where delight
Both sanction is and reason good,
Those things we do, spellbound by
night,

By day bring no compunctious mood—
So 'tis no mutiny of the blood
Moves Peridore in present plight
To take, and give, both clasp and kiss,
Nor reckon there is aught amiss.

42 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

10

Kisses come soon, both warm and
plenty,
Where two are young and unconfin'd,
Their added years some nine-and-twenty,
And on their mating all their mind.
They cling, they kiss, they lie en-
twin'd,
Their cruse of longing never empty,
But surging like the sea unsated,
Flowing again ere all abated.

11

Nor lackt their tongues of ardent matter
More than their lips of their commerce ;
Ceasing to kiss, they 'gan to chatter
Of themes 'twere idle to rehearse.
" I love you," his, " I love you," hers—
What kindled pair knows not the
patter ?
And having run on in this strain
An hour or more, why—to it again.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 43

12

He had her name now—Paravail,
And taught her his, as Peridore ;
Knew her his mother's fireside tale,
The fosterling her bosom bore
But a short month, ere it was tore
Away on just such frenzied gale
As blew it in, and how she said
That child was lost, and shook her
head.

13

She ponder'd that, her warm cheek
laid
Against his own, her left arm flung
About his middle ; then afraid,
Straiten'd her hold on him, and clung,
As if beyond her telling tongue
The thought within her. Yet she said,
Whisp'ring, " Not lost, unless you
choose
Reject what Vigilas doth refuse."

44 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

14

Now of that hermit he must hear
The very truth ; for of the man
The countryside all stood in fear.
None past his dwelling but he ran
With might, in case the dread out-
span
Of his gaunt arms should fix him there
Rigid in sin—for sin, it seem'd,
Encompast us more than we
dream'd.

15

Snugly she laught, and tuckt her feet
The closelier in, what time her face
Upturn'd to his made it unmeet
Straiter to draw his arm's embrace.
Nay, nor just now was kissing-case
For youthful blood at fever-heat—
His throbbing eyes explored the
grass ;
But, " Have no fear of Vigilas,"

16

Said she ; “ altho’ his face is lin’d
So deep my finger could lie hid
Within the furrows ; he is kind,
And hardly ever am I chid.
Rather it seems as if *he* did
The sin. He chides himself, I
find,
The more I coax ; for if I say,
Kiss me, he shivers and turns
grey,

17

“ And bites his cheek, or to the
floor
Falls, with his forehead battering it ;
Or to the great Cross by the door
Clings as if he were in a fit ;
And if upon his knee I sit
He flings me off, and trembling sore,
Cries *Apage !* or some such word
In some tongue which I never heard.

46 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

18

"Yet he thinks much of me I
know,
For oftentimes his eyes grow full
With looking at me, and his woe
Is piteous when I am dull,
Forget my wicked parts, or pull
His beard, or chafe to be let go ;
And when he thinks me fast asleep
He stands above me, and I peep,

19

"And see the tears fall down his
cheeks,
And little rivers in his beard ;
Then presently reproach he speaks,
As if he thought some one o'erheard
Who is not I. 'Lord, speak one
word.
What have I done amiss ?' then shrieks,
'Lord, if I save her, may I not
Myself be sav'd, and this forgot ?' "

20

But Peridore, gone pale as death,
 May hardly suffer her to end
 Before he speak. "O love," he
 saith,
 "I know not whither this may tend.
 Either that man must be your friend
 Or I—" he strove to cope with breath—
 "Not both—not both! Touch him no
 more,
 Or look your last on Peridore!"

21

Dismay'd she hears him, then she
 peers
 Into his face, then touches him;
 He turns away to hide his tears,
 Tries hard to make his visage grim.
 Hating to see his eyes grow dim,
 She kisses them till light appears,
 Promises truly all his will
 So only he may love her still.

48 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

22

The sun goes down, the sky grows
faint,

The evening star shines clear and cold ;

Now he must quit his innocent

And lead his flock across the wold ;

And she must face her master old

With news which well may prove him
saint

Or none at all. Lightfoot she flits

Homeward, and meek at table sits.

23

But never a word has she to say

Of Peridore, or love, or kisses.

Think it not strange—for who's the
may

Shares with a man such secret blisses ?

Of all ways open to her this is

The last and thorniest. Judgment Day

Could not require it. Fatima's lord

Would find no key to unlock that hoard.

24

Withal she kneels with him at pray'r,
 Bows with him at the holy Name,
 Suffers his hand upon her hair,
 Listens his comfort or his blame,
 And is not conscience-prickt. No
 shame

Hath she, yet watches full of care
 He touch nought of her but her
 head,
 Nor till it's dark will go to bed.

25

And long before the morning glory
 Washes the grassy sea, and steeps
 Each island-holt and promontory
 In gold and blue, while Vigilas
 sleeps,

Thirsty for love, her way she creeps
 Into the twilight chill and hoary,
 And like a homing bird makes flight
 For Peridore and heart's delight.

H

50 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

26

As from a sharded chrysalis
The dragon-fly of quivering wings
Sueth his metamorphosis,
So Peridore deliverance brings
To Paravail. Unearthly things
Open upon her where he is,
And all that she has learn'd as
yet
It seems her business to forget.

27

Even as a faërie wanderer
Treads deeplier in the wonder-
wood,
Seeing at every step more fair
The still, enthralled solitude,
Attentive what shy creatures brood
Or darkly follow everywhere
Her steps may tend—so now went
she
Gossamer'd round in mystery.

28

This love, how wonderful a thing,
Which as it older grows, grows
younger !
This lifting heart, this power of wing
Which, more you try it, waxes stronger !
This throbbing zest, this holy hunger,
This high flood ever at the spring !
This warmth and cover in all
weathers,
Safe under Peridore's breast-feathers !

29

A charter'd bondslave, now she walks
Valuing herself, held cheap before ;
Herself, where goes she, how she
talks,
Possess unto the heart's deep core !
Stirring, a wave from Peridore
Like a warm tide her utterance baulks ;
And if 'tis sweet by's side to swim,
'Tis sweeter still to drown in him !

30

Now in her person she takes pride,
 Sees to a flower-knot for her frock ;
 Must have her tresses fairly tied,
 Peers in the dark pool to take
 stock

Of arching eyebrow, random lock,
 Since such gear is presanctified—
 How should it not be, tallied o'er,
 Apprais'd and kist by Peridore ?

31

So ran her days. Yet do not think
 Grim-favour'd Vigilas grown blind,
 Who like a barn-owl sat ablink
 With sear'd eyes in a face belin'd.
 Scourged by a tempest of the
 mind,

He sat, and felt his sore heart shrink
 Like a dry nut of last year's fall,
 Rattling and shrivel'd, parcht and
 small.

32

By day, by night, he sat aburning,
And seem'd to hear his heart's long
wail

Incessant as the bell-buoy's mourning
Heard when a sea-mist clogs the sail,
And sight is nought. O Paravail !
O Paravail ! returning, turning
The too-lov'd name of too-lov'd child,
Too-dearly rescued from the wild !

33

There came an autumn dawn when,
watching,

He heard without a fluted note,
And saw her listen, heard her catching
Of breath, a quick hand to her throat.
With step so light she seem'd to float,
He saw her gain the door, unlatching
Without a sound—then she was
gone.

He leapt, and after her, on and on.

IV. DEATH IN LIFE

I

LIGHT as a roe whereas she fled
The misty hollows dense with dew,
So like a hound the Hermit sped
Upon her traces, she in view.
Down the grey acres straight and true
She flasht, he coursing where she led,
Till in a silent grove of trees
Doubtful she stay'd. He dropt to his
knees.

56 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

2

With glazed, dull eye he pored her
over

Where like a shaft of light she stayed,
Such fairy light as seems to hover
'Twixt pine-stems in a woodland glade.
But what comes now? A glancing
shade,

Whereat the skulker in his cover
Felt his dark heart toll like a bell,
Of pride and peace the funeral knell.

3

Unto his love those trees among,
Unto his darling hovering there
There came a shepherd tall and young
Whose sunburnt legs and arms were
bare ;

To him she ran, and her too fair
Treasure upon his breast she flung.
Lockt heart to heart, he saw him cup
Her face, as if he'd drink it up.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 57

4

His heart was choked, as if a bond
Was taut about it ; in his neck
The veins swell'd up, and like a pond
The blood slugged in them slow and
thick.

A film of orange seem'd to stick
Between him and the green beyond,
Where in the sun-bedappled dale
Peridore kiss'd his Paravail.

5

White were his knuckles, seam'd and
fray'd,
White were his knees, but all the rest
Of him was mottled, splasht and splay'd
With crimson of the blood-red West.
His gaping mouth was like a nest
Of serpents. Of his eyes were made
Two pits of hunger which might
raven
Prey from the very ramp of Heaven.

I

6

Jealousy, Love's unfriendly friend,
Which paints with men's own wickedness
Those whom they love, and goads them
mend

By cursing what they cannot bless ;
To wreck what is not to possess
Sooner than see another spend—
Jealousy now with whip and goad
Drove Vigils the devil's road.

7

Glued to his own abhorrent vision,
He needs must watch their dalliance
And, like a fever'd wretch in prison
Dreaming of water, so enhance
His torment. Time and circum-
stance

Stand still expecting his decision.
Not yet, not yet ! He peers and
cowers,
And all they do his eye devours.

8

Peridore with his belting arm
 About her leads her deeplier in
 The wood, and there, with worship
 warm,
 Cherishes her ; remote from sin,
 As one might woo a seraphin
 He serves her, innocent of harm.
 He would as soon befoul the Host,
 Or rail upon the Holy Ghost.

9

But he who once had been witch-
 breaker
 Was now possest by seven devils ;
 And now knew how the Mischief-
 maker
 Can spur to war or wildcat revels.
 Racing across the rolling levels,
 His soul became a battle-acre
 Wherein the ghostly armies strove
 Of Heavenly lore and human Love.

60 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

10

That was a dreadful dialogue !

“ O Lord, she is mine ; Thou gav’st me her.”

“ *Nay, sinner, all are Mine.*” “ This dog Will raven all, and I not stir ! ”

“ *How save her so, thou coveter ?* ”

“ Lord, if I exorcise the rogue Involv’d with her in lechery ? ”

“ *See to it she involve not thee.*”

11

“ Lord, I am strong, Thou know’st me well.”

“ *Tempt me not, Vigilas, my son.*”

“ I sav’d her once from fires of Hell.”

“ *Wherefore undo what thou hast done ?* ”

“ Nay, Lord, I finish what’s begun, Let her come back with me to dwell.”

“ *Thou art to choose. Is this thy choice ?* ”

“ Yea, Lord,” says he with croaking voice.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 61

12

Shuddering he stood, griped in his
heat,
Stung by his want to eloquence,
The which his conscience to defeat
Must first convert his native sense ;
To which even God's omnipotence
Must vail upon the Judgment-Seat.
Towards high Heaven he lift his hand
And shook it, as it held a brand.

13

" I choose, I choose. The soul I
snatcht
I will keep fast against the Fiend ;
So he shall find himself outmatcht,
For sin to me is tilth unglean'd.
Then when I have her purg'd and
clean'd,
Credit me with a soul unscratcht."
The round-backt earth lay like a swine
In heavy sleep. God sent no sign.

62 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

14

Back on his tide of rage he strode,
Back to the brake where those two lay,
And burst upon their ferny abode
Like hail upon the buds of May.
Affrighted, blencht, afoot stood they,
Handfasted still. His mad eyes glow'd
To see. "O Sir," the young man
said,
"Let me with Paravail be wed."

15

Baying on him, "Avoid me, hound,
Lest I should strike thee down," he
caught
Paravail by the wrists, and bound
The two together. "Have I taught
Thee so amiss, thou good-for-nought,
That Legion makes thee seeding-ground?
Come home with me, O thou accurst,
Come home, come home, and do thy
worst."

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 63

16

Drooping and caught, with her thin
hands

Fast bound, and all her radiant hair
About her face, whereof the bands
Being loost reveal'd her still more fair
And still more rifled ; guilty there,
Yielding her ravisht heart she stands,
As shamed as if, to rob her best,
He had dar'd his hand within her
vest.

17

No time to nurse her ruth she has ;
His lifted hand points out her way.
Homeward she slinks, with Vigilas
Driving her, as a drover may
A new-wean'd calf on market-day
With stick to scare her from the grass.
Bitter the cud she chew'd and
swallow'd—
Peridore miserably followed.

64 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

18

He drave her home, and with a
pin
Of iron fasten'd up the door,
And then began to scourge her sin
With mighty clamour and uproar—
Torment untold for Peridore,
Battering and crying, " Let me in ! "
There agonising must he bide,
Listening the dreadful work inside.

19

A sky, like metal overhead,
Beat back the noise ; the cruel sun
From his meridian vantage-stead
Mockt at his eyes till his head
spun.
O high young heart so put upon,
O generous blood so freely sped,
Pity so prodigally strewn !
He rav'd and cried until 'twas
noon.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 65

20

At that hour, as his custom was,
Out of his hut to pray and scourge
His writhen back came Vigilas ;
And as in greater need of purge,
So now he plied the whistling
verge
Until his old skin was a mass
Of shining torment. " Thus I
score,"
Said he, " the proud flesh I abhor."

21

But the fond youth, beside his wit,
Was at the entry, whispering there
To his beloved, " O my sweet,
Speak but one word to my
despair ! "
No answer wins he to his pray'r,
The house rings hollow as a pit.
In misery he lifts his head,
Howling, like dog his master dead.

K

66 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

22

Back comes the Anchorite, and sees him,
Leaps at him, has him by the scruff ;
To earth he pulls him, throws and kneels
him :

“ Thou hast done robbery enough—
Night-thief, beware ! ” The boy is tough,
Slips from his grasp, jumps up and flees
him

A certain distance. There he waits
His enemy, present as the Fates.

23

Then Vigilas, irresolute,
Remember'd him of that grey beast
Which, hiding Satan in a brute,
Lay at his threshold and not ceast
To snarl and snap. His rage in-
creast

To pluck this danger at the root.
He threw his hands up, swiftly past
Into his hut and made all fast.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 67

24

So to it again with potent cries,
As round a roof-tree screams the
 gale,
To battle and to terrorise
The nested fiend in Paravail :
“ I know thee, Legion, hoof and tail—
Come out, come out, thou Father of
 Lies ! ”
Thus challenged he his foe by name
And bided answer—but none came.

25

None came. It was more tolerable
To hear his cries beat Heaven's
 door
Than in the awful hush, which fell
Whenas he stopt, to hear no more.
His own heart then to Peridore
Tolled like the lonely passing-bell—
Adieu, adieu, thou lovely breath !
Be gentle ; she was gentle, Death.

68 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

26

So this lad, stricken to the marrow,
Watcht out the setting of the sun,
His young soul broken by the
harrow

Of this ferocious champion.

The cold stars came out one by one ;
The sickle moon, sword-bright and
narrow,

Like a rapt mystic dream'd aloof,
But show'd him figures on the roof.

27

Cloven by fear, he saw two shapes,
Sharp-nosed, vivacious, chin to chin,
Sit straddlewise, and more like apes
Than women, ply their hands obscene.
With gesture rude and hateful grin
They mockt the starlight with their
japes.

It seemed to him the night grew red,
Glowing with shame of what they did.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 69

28

Then one to t'other, "Fly, Tib,
fly,"

But t'other, "Nay, not yet, not yet.

Let us know where old Sanctity

Bestows the corpse he howls to get."

"Why," says the first, "he wastes his
fret.

She has no soul. For I was by

When the fond fool went out and pluckt

Her from the breast ere she had suckt

29

"A month of mother's milk." They
rais'd

Their wicked heads and nos'd the air ;

On high they laught as they were craz'd ;

Then with a skip one took a scare

And jump't upright. "Beware, beware,"

She chattered shrilling, and so blaz'd

New horror. One flew first, one after,

Flacking their way with mirthless laughter.

70 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

30

He batter'd on the door. "What now?"
Forth came the hermit, grey as fear.

"Still dost thou tempt me? What
wouldst thou?"

"Sir," said the youth, "some news of
her."

"What's she to thee?" "Alas, good sir,
If she do live she's life, I trow,
To me, and if she die, I die."

"She dies to live," was his harsh cry.

31

Then Peridore, "Sir, give me food,
Or I must die." The hermit said,

"What matters that?" yet thought it
good

To fetch him out a hunch of bread.

So man and boy together fed,

And Peridore, with strength renew'd,
Reported what the witches told—
Paravail still but one month old.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 71

32

“ One month, no more, for as they
say

The soul is drawn from mother's breast.
How is she damn'd then ? ” “ By my
fay,”

Says Vigilas, “ but I know best
What is her state, and how possest,
Seen that my craving has no stay.”
Says Peridore, “ Mayhap 'tis thee
Old Legion hath in slavery.

33

“ I am a sely shepherd boy,
And thou a saint, withal I wis
That holy men he can decoy
And witch them see the world amiss.
For if too full my belly is
I see the green earth empty of joy.
How then if in sweet Paravail
Thou read thyself ? ” The Saint turn'd
pale.

34

"I cannot hear thee ! Therefore, out,"
Cried he. "The world is stuck with
vice.

Avaunt, fiends all ; another bout
Should win a soul for Paradise."
He turn'd within doors ; soon his cries
To Heav'n fill'd all the plain with shout
Like battle ; and the lad gone white
Howl'd like a dog to the moon's cold
light.

35

No more of this. The slow dark creeps
Tow'rds dawn, and now a hush falls
down
On him who rails and him who weeps ;
Pity and Mercy find their own.
And what of her ? Where is she blown ?
In what abysmal heights or deeps
Flitteth that newborn child of ruth,
Too much lov'd, or too little, in sooth ?

36

'Twas in the first grey hour of
morn

Came Vigilas forth from his house,
Being to view a soul forlorn,
His jaws all loose and cavernous.
Mattock and shawl he bore, and thus
He said in voice grown thin and worn,
" Quick, dig a grave, three feet or four ;
For Paravail will need no more."

V. PERIDORE

I

THIS word of haste then—this is death !
This terror then—this stabbing dart !
But what is this that chills the breath
And drives the blood back from the
heart ?

What is this worm that gropes apart
Within the brain and whispereth ?
The sky flam'd o'er the lad, who
stood
Gaping upon a field of blood.

76 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

2

But Vigilas with working jowl
Says, "Help, for we must dig it
quick."

He answers not, but takes the showl
And sets foot on it. "Take the pick,"
Says Vigilas, "my soul is sick,"
And stood there blinking like an owl.
"No, no," says Peridore, shivering,
"Never the pick. Keep thou the
thing."

3

But Vigilas fixt in his lust
Would keep the showl, so Peridore
Pickt up the turf, and brake the
crust
Of chalky marl a foot or more,
Then stay'd while Vigilas turn'd o'er
The clods and shovel'd out the dust,
Not ceasing as he wrought to groan
Of his late battle, and make moan.

4

"Once I was tempted by a cur
Which at my door would lie and pant :
I drave at him, he would not stir ;
I slew him, yet he still would
 haunt

The place. I am not ignorant
That burying will not rid me her.
For Paravail and that grey dog
Were both indwelt by the old
 Rogue.

5

"Natheless to bury her I choose,
Because, so lovely as she seems,
I could not bear to see her lose
That favour which the world esteems,
Though it be false as feverish dreams,
Root of all ill and shameful use—
Yet, O Lord Christ, I could not
 bear

To see worms fret a thing so fair."

78 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

6

With that he leapt forth of the pit,
Mad with the anguish thinking
brought—

“ Pick deeper, pick it deeper yet,
Let her lie too far down for thought.
Let her lie hidden as she ought
That no remembrance of her flit.”
Peridore gnaw'd his burning cheek,
And drave a foot down with the
pick.

7

“ She is so little as she lies,”
Says Vigilas, at his shovelling work,
“ This grave we dig is oversize ;
Yet she will watch me thro' the murk,
And wheresoe'er abroad I lurk
I shall be haunted by her eyes.
For, look you, they are open wide ;
I could not shut them, tho' I
tried.”

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 79

8

Now Peridore, who felt his rage
Throb in his neck and make it
 swell,
Dar'd not in pickwork to engage
Lest he should wreak a vengeance fell ;
And when the man began to tell
Of what dark sin she had been cage—
“Ha' done,” he says, “give me no
 more
Lest you were worse off than before.”

9

Then he fell-to and pickt his piece,
But Vigilas must grumble and talk ;
To drown that voice, his strokes
 increase,
Cleaving long fissures in the chalk.
“No load like this on my life's walk,”
Says Vigilas, “has tried my knees.”
The boy looks up with sullen glare
In his dark eyes : “Old man, beware.”

80 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

10

“ Hey ! ” cries the hermit, “ have I not
Been wary ! Tempted fifteen year—
First by a suckling, then by what
Seem'd fair a child as you could rear ;
Then by a dangerous maiden fere
Whose white arms were a strangling
knot :

What have I done, O God most
high ? ”

“ Murder,” says Peridore, and lets fly.

11

Flatlings he smote him, but he lay
Prone where he fell, a huddled mass,
Reduced to that insensate clay
Whereto all flesh must come, and
grass.

Peridore left him where he was
And to the hovel broke away—
There he saw Paravail laid out ;
Folded within her burial clout.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 81

12

She made a thin line, east to west,
With candles at her head and
feet ;

A wooden cross was on her breast,
Her two hands folded over it.
He dar'd not look, her eyes to meet,
Which saw some dread not manifest
To him ; it was as if she knew
What he had done, and what would
do.

13

What awful cold communion
Holds she behind her staring eyes ?
What secret knowledge of deeds
done

Has she, so heedless, yet so wise
That of this day's long agonies
She has no memory to shun,
But all the past is folded in,
And all the clamour, and all the sin ?

M

82 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

14

Peridore stood, while pity gript
His heart and terror lockt his teeth ;
Astare he stood and ashen-lipt,
Looking his first on hapless death.
Then his blood gave him steadier
 breath
To dare his work. He kneel'd and dipt
His arms beneath her clay - cold
 clout,
Lifted her up and bore her out.

15

Leaping the heedless prostrate man
Who lay behuddled on his side,
Leaping the slow dark stream which
 ran
Out of a ragged wound and wide ;
With neither ruth for homicide,
Nor fear of death, nor any plan
Save to be lonely with his dead,
Clasping her close, he lightly fled.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 83

16

Westward he ran, not knowing
 where
Nor why he went ; but ever so
He felt a tumult in the air
Threshing behind as he did go—
Rage, wild endeavour, frantic woe,
Great vanning wings driv'n by despair :
He durst not think, he durst not
 see
What kept him fearful company.

17

By hill, by dale, by marsh and pool,
By woodside, thro' the gorse and brake
He made a way, his two arms full
Of his dead love with eyes awake—
With open eyes which could not take
Their watch from him ; and still a school
Of hunting voices follow'd after
With taunts and screams and harrowing
 laughter.

84 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

18

"He hath the soulless child, give
chase !

Head off, head off, he seeks the Mount !
Beware he reach the Hill of Grace
Or she the never-staying Fount !"
Shrill voices which he could not
count

Like unseen pinions flackt his face.
It was like battling thickset briar
Or with the writhing spears of fire.

19

But he urged forward none the less
With sobbing breath, on tottering knees,
His eyes were dimm'd with feebleness,
He blunder'd into roots of trees.
Light fail'd him ; headlong one of these
Brought him to earth, and consciousness
Lay freight and sumpter. Hidden there,
The coursing tongues swept by on
th' air ;

20

And Earth and Hell, alike with
 Heaven,
 Were blotted out in dreamless sleep ;
 And whether he were damn'd or shriven
 He knew not, sous'd in swoon so deep ;
 Yet his arms held their strenuous
 keep
 Of that for which all day he'd striven.
 So slept he, till his soul did hark
 The crystal song-spray of the lark.

21

Then slowly to his mind came back
 The terror and stress of overnight,
 The purpose of the fell air-pack,
 The words they shrill'd in their affright.
 What Hill of Grace had they in sight ?
 What Fountain could his dead love
 lack ?
 Slowly he stretcht himself, and then
 Stirr'd, to look on the world again.

86 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

22

The sun, high in his dome of blue,
Entranced the secrets of the glade
Wherein he sat with courage new,
Wherein his heart's desire was
laid,
Staring with fixt eyes unafraid
And wan as wax the light shines
thro'—
Wan, yet so lovely and so pure,
He could not deem her dead for sure ;

23

But thought her spirit yet indwelt
Her straight slim lines in patience
Until the rigid ice should melt
Which bound her limbs and palsied
sense.
If he could draw it out from thence
Into himself, then die ! He knelt,
And leaning on his finger-tips
Near'd with his lips her frozen lips.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 87

24

Even so, he dar'd not put to proof
His longing, so his pitifulness
Was wrung to see her hold aloof,
Smiling her secret to possess.
"Ah, tell me more, or tell me
less !"

He cried, and searcht the azure roof
Of mortal things which shuts God out
From all our misery, care and
doubt.

25

Soft on his ears there fell that note
Wherewith the wood-dove woos his
mate,
Bowing and swelling out his throat,
A song half soothful, half sedate.
Picking a stone, he sent dark fate
Remorseless on that head devote.
The bird fell dead, and Peridore
Stabb'd in its breast and drew the gore.

88 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

26

Therewith her lips and cheeks he toucht,
And saw the crimson liquor gleam.
He caught his breath, his heart was
clutcht,
So warm and living did she seem.
And what was this, truth or a dream ?
Had that been more than blood that
smutcht
Her marble face ? She breathes, she sighs,
And looks on him with living eyes.

27

She lives ! He draws her to him,
yearns
Over her, feels her limbs relax ;
On a slow tide the heat returns
Into that pallid form of wax.
Closer he clasps—what is't she lacks,
Stirring and nozzling ? He discerns
This is a babe upon his lap,
Seeking the mercies of the pap.

28

Up, Peridore, thy work's to do !
 Quest like a bird to feed thy
 chick.

Thou hast not what she looketh to,
 The draught for which her soul is sick ;
 None the less keep her body quick
 With grain and berry masht in dew,
 For long's the way, and steep to
 trace

The stations of the Hill of Grace.

29

At gaze he stands. The brown oak
 woods

Stretch, upward sloping, many a league
 To hills and wind-washt solitudes.

There in the blue—his heart grows big
 With promise greater than fatigue—

There in the blue a high hill broods—
 The Hill of Grace ! Let him not fail
 Thither to bear his Paravail.

N

90 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

30

Brisk as a starling for his young
He hunted wide the kindly fruit ;
From lush grass - stalks the juice he
 wrung,
Took toll of berry, nut and root.
She with no human attribute
Of memory, knowledge, mind or tongue,
Took what he tender'd, even
 throve,
Yet knew not of him and his love.

31

Hungry, she whimper'd ; fill'd, she
 slept ;
Fondled, she laught, as children use ;
At kissing she was ill adept,
Meeting with nerveless lips and loose
His own, not knowing to refuse
The love he proffer'd, nor accept ;
Withal her soulless eyes and clear
Marvel'd to find his own so near.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 91

32

So for love's sake he love forswore
And purg'd the runnels of his thought,
Content to touch her nevermore
Once to the Fountain safely brought.
Thither he urg'd, and she, new-
taught,
Beside him dared one foot before
The other, watching in his face
Ever assurance, blame or praise.

33

Now woods gave way to lands swept
bare,
With open hillsides all of thyme
And gold rockrose. A keen hill air
And fragrant spoke another clime.
The byres and houses seemed of lime
And brick unknown; the fields were fair
With unknown flowers; the children
played
New games, and hid whenas he stayed.

92 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

34

But ever as they go the hills
Grow nearer, and the signs of them
Sharper ; more musical the rills,
Swifter, more difficult to stem ;
And now they touch the mountain's
hem

Where tumbled rock the valley fills,
Where every boulder seems to beat
Dry in your face the radiant heat.

35

Now is to breast a long white road,
Serpentine in and out the rocks,
Whereon the flooding sun lay
broad
And sharp the savour of the box.
Here goats were scatter'd, 'stead of
flocks

Of sheep, and rivers raced, not flow'd
In measur'd eddies ; here the trees
Seem'd summer full. Atop he sees

36

A wonder-prospect—peak on peak
 Of silent mountains ; fields of snow,
 A solitude which seemed to speak,
 So did its exaltation grow
 Upon the mind. But just below,
 Look, Peridore ! the place you seek—
 A shoulder thrusting from the mountain,
 The precinct of the Endless Fountain.

37

A fair white temple wall'd in shade
 Of winking leafage, with a court
 Wherein a gushing wellspring play'd
 For ever, falling crisp and short
 Into a basin. 'Tis the port
 You seek ; your pilgrimage is made.
 This is the Well where thirsty mouth
 May win redemption of its drouth.

VI. LIFE IN DEATH

I

HALF in the shady quiet recess
Fram'd by the portal, half without,
He stands, holding his faint mistress,
Doubtful, but not left long in doubt.
A white-rob'd youth comes gravely
out
As if his errand he could guess—
“What seek ye at the Shrine of
Grace?”
“Succour—the comfort of this place,”

2

Says Peridore, "for who was dead
And is newborn." "Give her to
me,"

The youth replied. Peridore said,
"Not so. If I fail, what can ye?"
"Wait then, I come back presently"—

So he was told, and bow'd his head,
And waited in the drowsy calm
Whose peace anointed him like balm.

3

Again the youth stood at the door
And beckon'd, "Follow." By his
side

They travers't many a corridor
Empty and long, cool, dusky and wide;
So to an entry, not to bide,
But thro' a curtain to a floor
All of deep blue. A bed was there;
On that a woman of dark hair

4

And full calm eyes and grave aspect
 Sat, in a loose white gown yclad,
 Which a red girdle did collect
 About her. No more robe she had
 Than that. "Ask here," then said the
 lad,
 "That which you need." "Lady, pro-
 tect
 This shelterless," says Peridore,
 "And feed this starving of your store."

5

Then said that still-voiced lady,
 "Bring
 The child ; " so to her knees, as bidden,
 He led his love, as wan a thing
 As snow in shadow'd valley hidden.
 Listless and vague and heavy-lidden
 She stood, like bird with broken wing
 Which has no quarrel with the Fates
 But hopeless, helpless, doom awaits.

o

98 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

6

There as she sway'd, her ebbing
sap
Fail'd her ; she droopt, but as she slid
The lady drew her to her lap
And there supporting her, undid
Her girdle, and the treasure hid
Laid bare, the swelling beauteous pap.
Paravail lay, her lips aswoon
In touching distance of their boon.

7

Shadowing her face with her own
face,
The lady whispers bidding words :
Peridore knows not what she says,
But his love's grey lips, like a bird's
Thirsting, half-open, pant as girds
Her fighting heart for breathing space.
The lady stoopt, and as she laid
Bosom to mouth, more words she
said,

8

Quicklier and yet more urgently,
And unto Paravail the teat
Offered ; and after striving, she
Grappled the fountain of her
meat :

Murmurs anon, the pulsing beat
Of drinking, and the ecstasy
Of giver and given fill'd his ears
With rhythm, and his eyes with tears.

9

The usher asks, " Are you con-
tent ? "

Peridore deeply bows his head,
And turning leaves his innocent
In a fair way to be soul-fed.
Following where his leader led,
With prayerful hands and head still
bent,

He enters in the way of school
Of them who serve this holy Rule.

100 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

10

Five moons in full, for nothing
less

Than six in all will serve to verse
A soul into our cage of stress,
Lay Paravail with her wet nurse.
Five moons had Peridore to rehearse
The memory of his frowardness ;
And losing so his passion-fever,
Attain'd to love her more than
ever.

11

For now he learn'd where passion
drives,
A hot rank wine still on the lees ;
And how 'twixt paramours and wives
There stands a stage of high degrees,
Wherefrom, if one can look, he sees
Whither he tends who takes two lives
Into one keeping, and of them
Hopes to engraft one fruiting stem.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 101

12

Not by heat only look to increase,
Nor think without heat to ensure it.
You have no love who have no
 peace,
And find no peace who not inure it.
Love fallen sick, you cannot cure
 it ;
Labour to love is love's surcease ;
Nor deign to salve your body's smart
Upon her own who has your heart.

13

Nay, rather, but let holy zeal
To make of two a perfect whole
Possess you. Be it yours to seal
Your impress on her melting
 soul ;
Or she th' unwritten virgin scroll
Your high intention to reveal—
And so fulfil the sacred pact
You made, by sacramental act.

102 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

14

Learning, he grew to man from lad ;
And now instead of clogging thirst,
Desire for Paravail he had
Saner than what he felt at first.
Now let him face the best and worst
Fortune may send him ! and be
glad
With her—not elf, but very woman,
The lovelier for being human.

15

So in the first flush of the year
When springtime veils in green the
earth,
She is restored, an argoseer
To ship the burden of his worth.
They clasp, they kiss with holy
mirth,
And turn their homefaring to steer,
Obedient, chaste, presanctified,
Grown man and woman side by side.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 103

16

Taller she seem'd, who had been small,
Strong once, now lax and delicate ;
Her eyes were grave and mild, her
call

Low and yet urgent : the dove's mate
Churrs in the heat no more sedate
Than she, and no more musical.
She who had once been tann'd and
hale

By weather, now went honey-pale.

17

And where of old she leapt to his arms,
And eager quested for his kiss,
Taking no thought to hoard her
charms,

Seeing in clipping nought amiss,
Now she denied his crowning bliss
Till darkness cover'd her alarms ;
But then her kindness made amends,
So all is well that so well ends.

18

Forth fare those pilgrims level-
breasted
Towards the land that rear'd them ; so
They leave the uplands many-crested,
Going out one who went in two.
One trial more remains to do,
That Heaven's good law be mani-
fested—
Patience a last time ; Heaven has
A saving deed for Vigilas.

19

Hard by the verges of the Plain
Whereto at length the travellers come,
A murky eve of drifting rain
Warns Peridore not hope for home ;
He sees the wall'd town with its dome
And thither turns his rest to gain.
Gentle beside him, within touch,
Goes she for whom he'd dared so
much.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 105

20

Now in a strait and empty street
Whenas they sought their night's repair
Two woebegones they chanced to
 meet,
With hungry eyes, as if despair
Like an old spider sat in there
And slow thereof did drink and
 eat ;
Who as the wedded lovers near'd
From a dark entry watcht and peer'd.

21

" This is the youth who snatcht from
 sin
Paravail's soul, the Hermit's lass.
Stand fast, it may be we can spin
A web for our Lord Satanas,
Wherein when he encompass has
The two, his bounty we shall win.
Come now, denounce we to the Mayor
Vigilas' lure, and eke his slayer."

P

22

So as our pair in nuptial sleep,
Cling, her fair cheek to his laid close,
Harsh clamour wakes him forth to leap
And face an entry hot with foes :
Torchcs aflare, voices like blows
Upon the face. In vain to keep
The door. They fill the room to
choke
With hatred, cruelty, lust and smoke.

23

"Sirs," said the young man, "what would
ye?"
"Life for a life, the rope, the fire!"
Was cried on him. "The rope for thee,
And for the witch the torch and pyre."
White stands he up, he is no liar:
"Sirs, I am guilty, but not she."
"Thief, 'twas for her thou tookst a
life,
To win a scandalous witch for wife."

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 107

24

Fast now in common jail he lies,
So new made free of this good earth ;
While she must judge with temperate
eyes

What women be who sell their worth ;
Or to what ends we turn our birth,
Our heritage and our cognize
Of good and evil. Clay and God
Contend for us—we hug the clod.

25

Now he stands facing his array,
Nor will deny the deed he did.
'Tis testified he dared to slay
The man of God. He bows his
head.

“ I deem the fortunate earth well rid
Of one who turn'd a child's face
grey,”

Says Peridore, “ and am content
To pay the price. It is well spent.”

26

The rope for him and gallows tree,
For her the faggot and the flame !
One shall the other's torment see,
And each subserve a common
 shame ;
Withal their doomsday when it came
Brought Vigilas to set them free—
Brought Vigilas out like a flail
To thresh the seed of his own bale.

27

Into the market-place he strode,
His passion working like a yeast ;
There was no man to bar his road
Or turn him from his bitter tryst.
“ O ye,” he cried, hoarse as the beast
Which shepherds fear when fields are
 snow'd,
“ Loose me that maid ”—and it is done ;
“ And loose me him ”—his gyves are
 gone.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 109

28

“ Lo, how vainglory thought to
save

This my vile carcase, thin and old ! ”

Said he. “ Yet what is left I crave

For rope and fire, if fire be bold

To jump ere rope hath taken hold,

And rope care not which fill the
grave.

Then let old Legion find it well

To hob and nob with me in Hell.

29

“ Have at him there in sulphurous
field,

Since so he will, and may God wite

Which one of us to other yield

In what shall be my utmost fight.

For he shall meet a peer this night

Who hath no need of spear or shield.

If for his pleasure I go down,

I will abide there for mine own.

30

“ If God be glorified in Heaven,
In Hell also shall He be prais'd ;
And if those bolted doors be riven,
And those indurate gateposts razed,
Then let the damned look up
amazed,
In fair way to be school'd and shriven
By me, the first since Christ was
Lord
To harrow Hell with holy word.”

31

Further he said, “ Knot well your
rope
About this leathery neck, to be
A sign to Legion not to hope
That Death may claim a victory.
Now heap the fire and set me free
From this old cage wherein I grope
Too long.” So perisht Vigilas—
Even as he liv'd so his end was.

PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL 111

32

And men say from the blue fell
down

A shower of red rose-leaves, and lay
On Paravail, and made a crown
Upon her hair. And next they
say

That from the crackling fire a grey
And solemn bird lift o'er the town,
And up and ever upward soar'd,
Till lightning flashed like a bare sword,

33

And it was gone. The thunder
then

Peal'd admonition to the host
Of pale and wondering, gazing men
From Vigilas' accepted ghost.
As for the lovers, how they crost
The plain and vanisht too from ken,
Ask me not tell the quiet regale
Of Peridore and Paravail.

112 PERIDORE AND PARAVAIL

34

The uttermost that men report
Prophetic or of heart's desire
Comes to no prize of rarer sort
Than lies half-trodden in the mire
Beside the road, or hangs no higher
Than any man by stretching for't
May grasp—yet so deals man with man,
How many have graspt since time began ?

35

Or having graspt, how many have guess'd
Themselves enricht beyond compute
In wife to cherish breast to breast,
In children faithful to their root,
In forthright work whereby to fruit
The plunder'd earth and win good rest ?
Hereof, the tale saith, Peridore,
Having his arms full, crav'd no more.

1197 ——— The Loving History of Peridore
and Paravail, FIRST EDITION, cr. 8vo, cloth,
8s 6d 1917

Robell-Cat 364; Sept, 1930

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